INTERVIEW WITH PEARL EVELYN RIBBS HUTCHINSON

EAST SAN JOSE

Linda Kelly: I would just like having you talk about what you remember, but first of all let's start with your name.

Pearl Hutchinson: My name is Pearl Evelyn Ribbs Hutchinson; E-v-e-l-y-n; and R-i-b-b-s, the family name; and Hutchinson, H-u-t-c-h-i-n-s-o-n.

LK: And your parents?

PH: My parents were Henry and Laura Ribbs. My father was a plumbing contractor on Alum Rock Avenue. I suppose he started his business in something like 1918 -- in 1919, 1918, 1920 -- I know he was out here in 1919.

LK: When I spoke to my mom -- because we lived on the east side all my life, she remembered as soon as I said Ribbs.

PH: Everybody -- we were nicknamed spare ribs and every other kind of rib, bar-b-que ribbs, you know.

LK: Okay. And you said you had five children, five sisters and brothers?

PH: Five sisters and brothers. Alma -- five sisters and brothers -- four sisters and brothers, there are five of us. Alma was the eldest. Alma was the first student -- in fact, Alma was the first Negro, African, American, Black, whatever you want to call her, at Pala. She was the first one -- student, they had there and Mrs. Ring was the principal. Mrs. Ring was the principal, I can remember that, and then my brother Felix was the next. He was next to Alma. Then Juanita was next, and then me, then Bunny; so the five of us.

LK: Bunny, is the -- is Bunny his legal name, though?

PH: Bunny's name -- everyone knows him as Bunny. His real name is William Theodore. His son Willie T. is the race driver. All through life he went to school as Bunny so much so, and you know that even on invitations people will call and ask what's Bunny's real name, but it is William.

It was a good school. Pala was a very good school and it was certainly a rather difficult school. It was not easy at all. Some schools are easy and not to difficult, but they really made us work. Of course it's really not like today's schools because if you didn't do the work, if you didn't pass the county exam, you didn't get promoted. Just no such thing as a teacher saying it was -- you were going to be psychologically unfit. You would just have to be psychologically unfit, because if you didn't do the work you didn't get promoted.

LK: You said there was a county exam; did they have those at the end of the year?

PH: At the end of the year you had to pass their examination. Many a game you remember in those days so many times the parent did not start the children to school early sometimes the older kids, you know, especially -- there many foreign people. There were Italians, Portuguese, and Swiss I can name the families on down, the Post family.

Say for instance, in Alma's class there would be probably 17, 13, 15 kids to graduate; and even in her class reunion there was Santana family and the Zorias -- now those are names you can still see in San Jose a great deal. Zoria did fruit.

LK: Did they have...

PH: They had the orchards then. The Millers, Mr. Miller was a bus driver and he lived down on the corner of Jackson. Now you know where Alexian Brothers Hospital is, well, there was a little short street which would be going north. North Jackson down the -- I think there were only about two houses on the street and Mr. Miller was the bus driver. There were not -- I don't think they had busses when Alma first started, but by the time they got around to me and Bunny then they had started the buses but the other kids were older and they had left.

But the Miller kids, the Granados in San Jose used to be from orchards. Take for instance where we lived. I was born on Alum Rock Avenue, 2505 Alum Rock Avenue; which would be on the corner of Jackson. They later changed the numbers, but it would be Jackson. Okay. And on that street at the time when I was a child there was the Ribbs family, the Garcias, Mrs. Lewis, Mrs. Stuart, Mrs. Lutan and then the Zorias moved in. And there was nothing there, the Menzies owned a lot of orchards there and the Roosevelts down Madden Avenue. In other words there was nothing all the way down to -- you know where Alexian Brothers Hospital is, there was nothing. Then when you turned the corner then the Geonetos owned property until you got on to the school. So this is why we knew generally just about everybody in town.

LK: When you said "nothing" did you mean nothing like fields or orchards?

PH: Orchards, prunes and apricots, and it was pretty, very pretty and where Joey Franco's market is now that was a big field. You could actually see the tallest building in downtown San Jose and First. It used to be on First and Santa Clara and he had a field that would go down quite a ways. Well, that was past half way to King Road and just nothing but a field near Washington. It was very rural, but very pretty. Very, very beautiful and of course,

I think the people had a very, very fine rapport with each other. They got along very, very well. And at the school they did not

think, of course I suppose in schools all kids will fight, you know, and you could really more or less tell the ones who were from very fine families; much more so than the ones from poorer families. They were much more tolerant, you understand, they were much more tolerant.

And one thing in those days if they had a party, because you realize the school was small, if they had a party and one was invited everybody was invited. There was no such thing as excluding a youngster from a party. It was a little bit stranger now when Bunny's class graduated -- we didn't speak of in San Jose of prejudice and whatnot that was always there that's always going to be someplace. Schools -- where they have the graduation picnic we had to have it in the Alum Rock Park, it was beautiful in those days; horse trails, and hiking and whatnot.

My brother Bunny went to go into the pool swimming. We never took swimming lessons, my father could swim like a fish, but his children just did not know how to swim. But, anyway, Bunny -- they didn't allow Bunny to go swimming. Wouldn't allow Bunny to go swimming in Alum Rock Park. Bunny came in -- and of course the other children -- I can't think of -- it was Wolfe, Betty Wolfe and Ruth Wolfe's father was a supervisor. They were supervisor's children. And they brought the children from Alma's class and Juanita's class, and Bunny being the youngest any way, he was refused swimming privileges in Alum Rock Park. And the other children said if
Bunny doesn't swim, nobody swims and, of course, everybody, Mr. Wade

said, that's what friends are for.

When Bunny came home and my father and Reverend Orphanis, at that time, was our Pastor, they went down to the City and my father asked them why is it that -- why did you exclude my son from swimming? They said we have never done that. My father was very prominent in San Jose, he worked hard and made a very good living. And so they said, Ribbs, we just didn't know maybe nobody had ever gone swimming there, but he said this is at a school party, graduation party. He says, well, what are we going to do about it now? They said we are not going to do anything about it because he's going to go swimming. It's just as simple as that. Just very subtly it's nothing because he was there. He was there and of course so everybody could swim at Alum Rock Park, it's a city park, it's not city or county and of course rather ridiculous, but this is the way these things could be sometimes.

LK: When you remember that year that was roughly...

PH: Okay. Well, let's see if I was in the 7th grade in 1935, I graduated from Pala in 1936. Bunny would probably be two grades behind me. Bunny would be two grades behind me, he's 18 months younger.

LK: So, that would be 1938.

PH: About 1938 at least. 1938, not much farther, but in that time and this was the way it was it really hurt very much. Naturally it hurts children to feel that you can't do this and you can't do that. There were little things like that, but I think basically we got along -- everybody got along very, very well.

The Barcalos they used to call them that 49er man. How does he pronounce his name? He pronounced it differently. He had a riding academy and in Alma's class they had a horseback riding party; they owned the stables.

LK: At the entrance at Alum Rock Park?

PH: They would ride right there in the park. They owned the stables and that was a nice fun thing to do. We were talking about really pleasant memories, pleasant memories. And the Boat family they moved quick and they had a dairy here.

LK: The dairy was on McKee Road?

PH: Capitol. Their dairy was on White Road. White Road going south, no going --

LK: South or north?

PH: White Road going this way and they would be down going towards Alum Rock. No going the opposite direction; are we together?

LK: Yes.

PH: I see, Alum Rock.

LK: Towards Berryessa?

PH: No, going the opposite way.

LK: Alum Rock toward Story Road?

PH: That's correct and going that way, yes.

LK: All right.

PH: And they owned a tremendous, lots and lots of property and Martha was the older girl who was in Alma's class. I think you really learned how to actually -- you really learned how to understand a lot of languages. It was rather nice in that you could appreciate the different cultures from the different periods. As a matter of fact, I was known as the best Swiss dancer in town. We used to love to see polkas.

LK: They would share cultures then?

PH: Yes, they would come down -- we're going to do the polkas and those folk dances. You find that the Europeans really love the

polkas very, very much and of course I was very small and agile so they'd teach us the step and it was a lot of fun. There was another girl May Lit, I don't know where she lives.

LK: May Lit.

PH: May Lit, and I don't know how to spell her name. She and I were both very interested in gymnastics and you know hanging off the bars at Pala. The teachers used to absolutely run out of the window, because they would say, "Oh, surely they'll break their necks." You were hanging with nothing underneath, nothing but dirt and hanging and swinging on the bars and doing flips and whatever she got first prize in San Jose once in gymnastics and I got second. That was oh, I think, we used to do just about anything as far as gymnastics were concerned and, of course, we really didn't practice like the kids nowadays. We were working on lawns, on the lawns hanging on -- literally hanging by a toe on bars that were up very, very high and not frightened in the least. But then, of course, the schools used to play the other schools such as -- I don't know -- I can't remember ever doing to much, but we used to play Berryessa. You know, the games -- the various games you met some -- you met other children at the school and it's very strange and when they graduated from Berryessa and we graduated Pala, then we all went to Roosevelt. Because that's when we all went to Roosevelt and some of us have kept in touch throughout the years; the Sakane family, Teoko and Fudge Sakane and they lived on Berryessa Road. And they lived there until the war. You know, because we had been friends -- I think we met

when I was probably in about the 6th grade from Berryessa and then when we graduated each from each respective school and went to Roosevelt we were in homerooms there so we actually kept in contact all these years. A lovely letter I wrote not called occupation here, but in the internment and she says, "We'll be friends for ever", and that's always a very nice thought, hating to be separated.

LK: And her name again was...

PH: Her name was Hiyoko Sakane, H-i-y-o-k-o; and she was from Berryessa school.

LK: With Pala school you said it went from first to eighth grade?

PH: First to eighth grade.

LK: And then you graduated, you would go to Roosevelt?

PH: We'd go to Roosevelt. And then when you'd leave Roosevelt, you would either go to private school or go to San Jose High School.

PH: And San Jose High School, of course, then was on 7th Street or 11th Street or something like that. You know the high school and the college were together then.

San Jose High adjoined San Jose State College.

LK: So, it was clear over into the center of town more?

PH: Oh, sure. Probably around 7th and 8th Streets, near San Fernando.

LK: Okay.

PH: Oh, yes. And then there was a technical high school on -- that adjoined -- in other words -- high school, San Jose High School and San Jose State college.

LK: So, my goodness...

PH: So they are more or less together. When they moved San Jose High School way over on McKee Road or someplace like that, of course I'd left San Jose by then, I think they no longer have the technical high school and I think it was a wonderful, wonderful idea, because so many boys learned so much there. All of the trades and this is why I think it's really tragic in the world today that they can't.

LK: I think they're getting back more into that now.

PH: Are they? Oh, yes because the electricians and the plumbers, and the carpenters, the printers; oh, it was a fine technical high school. They had -- the only thing they didn't have to take was the real academics; the chemistry and whatnot, you know, what would be necessary. But I think Pala particularly was technically -- Pala

really, really provided us with a good education.

You know in the 8th grade we had to pass the civic exam; here I'm sure they probably still do it, but there was this -- they had to condense three sheets of the civic test. It was a known fact that if you really knew -- this is from the 8th grade -- if you knew that sheet of condensed form of the civic paper you could actually pass any college entrance exam. I kept that -- something else that I kept for just years and years and years. When my cousin was going to Cal she said, "Evelyn, can I use that thing to review?" You know when you have been out of school and you go back to school it's not exactly easy. So she said I've got to pass this because, in other words, what is the three departments of government? You know, the Executive, Judicial, Legislative; well, this is something that you can see I can remember it even now.
Let's face it, I was probably 12 or 13 years old in the eighth.

And so when my daughter was at Crocker School the year she graduated she said you have to pass the civic exam Mama -- and I said well, I'll tell you what, Karen -- she was a avid reader in the first place -- a child prodigy -- I said I have a paper that I had when I was in the eighth grade and I said it's so condensed. Simple things are what you just veto. You would be surprised how many young people they don't have the slightest idea what veto means.

Certain words -- there are so many words you have to know this and that it's only with a one word answer so that you can remember.

So when Karen -- she took it and she read over so my husband had a patient who was one of the teachers, he said it was fabulous. That piece of paper condensed and Karen she's the only one in the history of this school who has gotten a hundred on that test, natural 100.

And do you know -- would you believe that somebody took my paper? Somebody took it -- one of the teachers. Somebody took that piece of paper, I never got it back after all of those years. I said Karen where is my paper? And she said, mother, it was in my book and then it was gone, it was gone. Oh, darling, I've had it and I've passed it around for generations and generations.

I forgot this teacher's name she was very fond of Karen. It's so wonderful -- that was from my school Pala, when I was a little girl and young girl. You read that and it was just because you can pass many a test with just one word. Because when you can elaborate on that the one word is what triggers the answer.

But I can remember a lady, Mrs. McCabe, was the supervisor or the school supervisor or the county supervisor and she'd go around -- I told you that she loved my brother, Bunny -- she thought he was so cute. She'd take pictures of him and she'd actually pick him up from one school to the other and take him with her. She really thought he was a cute little boy and he could sing. There was a youngster called Bobby Breno when we were coming up he had a beautiful voice and Bunny also had a child soprano voice the teachers --

He's Bobby Breno, he was a movie star.

LK: Oh, okay.

PH: No, No. Oh, it would just bring tears to your eyes and Bunny could really, really, really sing so they liked Bunny very much. And there was another girl, Viola West, they lived on Sharff Avenue, which is right off Alum Rock Avenue and Jackson. And she was another one that was German. Her folks were from Germany and she had an absolutely exquisite voice.

It is one thing that was very, very wonderful and I remembered as a child many schools nowadays particularly that a child can be ever so talented, but there are such deep seeded prejudices in different people that they would never give this child the credit for being an outstanding child you understand what I'm trying to say.

Whereas, at Pala school Viola West the girl had a absolutely outstanding voice, and believe you me, every program she was on it. And they were not well to do people. You understand, her parents spoke very broken English. She just had a fabulous voice; for a fabulous voice is just a fabulous voice.

There were other children who could do something particularly well. They were always used. But many times in today's classes -- I can say that because my daughter was a child prodigy and now is a concert pianist. She's playing a concert this afternoon and I'm not

there.

But many times nowadays a teacher will want somebody to do something just because they particularly like that person, but they don't do it not really for art sake.

And then another thing see when we were in school whether you were Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, Holy roller or Buddhist whatever you were, at Christmas time you all took part in the play, and you all did your part, and you'd sing beautiful carols and the parents made these hats. And you had the scarves on and the things for the Christmas program. But nowadays in school it's different because they have to allow for Jewish people that don't believe and feel it's not Christmas. I know my daughter even here when people would say how do your children like Christmas she said it just did not seem like Christmas to her. There's no carols and there's no reverence but they said we have to do that because of the different ...

LK: Did they have like a Christmas pageant every year?

PH: Every year.

LK: And what -- the school put it on and all of the families came to see it.

PH: The school put it on in the auditorium -- the school was built; archways here one, two, three, four then the Principal's office is in

the front of the school, and then the nurses station on the opposite side. And then the other rooms going down like a courtyard effect. Then at the other end down at this end was the auditorium.

LK: So when they rebuilt it on White Road they kept the same format then?

PH: Did they really? I don't know because I didn't go to that one. They kept the same thing only, of course, this one was stucco with the Spanish tile and whatnot, and the large oak trees. Not oak trees, pepper trees with the benches built around it. They had a number of plays and every year they did this.

LK: Do you remember some of the teachers when either your sister or yourself were --

PH: I remember Mrs. Cauhape, and Mrs. Cauhape died not -- oh, my God -- she must have been ninety something. Her name was I think -- C-a-u-h-a-p-e and she was a rather -- an obstre person too. Probably not the most pleasant person. She was hard, she was a difficult teacher. Mrs. Nipper was a darling -- very pretty.

LK: You remember what grade?

PH: I think she taught the third grade or the second grade. And Mrs. Cauhape taught fourth; I know that she was a fourth grade teacher, but from those primary grades to that was a big switch, they

had us doing square roots. It's funny because Mrs. Sturdevant I think was the fifth grade teacher. I don't remember the sixth grade teacher. Mr. Santana was the seventh grade teacher and Mr. Heath was the eighth grade teacher so that was about four out of five that I remember. Mrs. Heath was a very, very nice person and -- and Mrs. Ring was the principal.

When Alma was in school and it was after the great depression, of course, I would be too young to really understand the depression and, of course, Alma was saying you know how and mother and daddy were saying how poor everybody was.

I can remember Alma graduated from Pala she told daddy that everybody wanted to get a watch for graduation and daddy told her he said, "oh, darling, I couldn't possibly afford to get you a watch"; "oh, but daddy, everybody -- all of the kids get watches and gold watches for their graduation." "Sweetheart, I'm sorry. Of course she was very sensitive. The eldest, what is it somebody said that parents were trained with the older children by the time it gets around to the younger ones they realize that life is okay.

For graduation she came home and she was the first Negro student to graduate from Pala and daddy came home and he told her -- she said, "Did you get my watch, daddy?" He said, "oh, no, darling, I told you that I couldn't afford it." She went to the room and of course she wept. He came in and held the watch over her and she was screaming, "daddy, you got it." Those were what you call the good

old days, you know she got her watch. Now Alma has talked to Lewis, Alma talked to -- well, they've had their thirty-year reunion from high school and a lot of people -- so many were gone.

But Alma -- you don't remember any of these people now, but Lewis Santana they were in education also together. Albert and Alvin they they were related to the Santanas. There is so many it kind of brings back real memories to think of some of these people because our house were spread so far apart that you did not -- you see our houses were spread so far apart in those days that you just did ot -- you could say my mother did not believe in our playing, you know, visting with neighbor's kids. When the neighbor kids would come over she always had things for us to do such as work. My father was very weird, he didn't believe in girls working out, but we had a lot of work to do at home; such as helping -- learning to cook, cleaning, he was getting a housekeeper, but he was a southerner.

LK: You said you were born here?

PH: I was born here.

LK: Were your brothers and sisters also?

PH: Bunny was born here. The others were born in Louisiana. My parents were originally from Louisiana -- from Shreveport.

LK: In what hospital were you born?

PH: San Jose Hospital.

LK: San Jose Hospital?

PH: I think my brother was born at home though.

LK: Oh, really?

PH: Yeah, he was born at home. That's just something that was rather strange. There was the Cola family. You see these were children in other words, when Alma graduated from Pala there were probably about 13 people maybe 14 in the class. And then when Felix graduated it was probably close to the same. When Juanita graduated it might be 16 or 17 people and when I graduated there probably were maybe 23, 24. And when Bunny graduated there was probably a fairly big class.

LK: The eastside had started to grow.

PH: The eastside had started to grow. It was -- well, after World War II -- what year did they move the Pala school?

LK: I'm not sure, it was there -- it would have been there in 1947 on White Road, which from 1938 till then I don't know.

PH: I know that because my nephew Ronald Bothwell was really the next one of our generation to -- which would be my nephew -- to

attend Pala and that would be Juanita's boy the third member of the family.

LK: And she remained on the eastside as far as that time.

PH: Yes, there's a street my father, you see, sold the corner but there's a street Ribbs Lane, you've seen that around here. My brother Bunny still lives there. Bunny lives on Ribbs Lane. Felix used to live on Ribbs Lane, but he sold it and he lives up higher on the hill -- the apartment building that my father built. I don't go back. I like San Jose it's not that, it's just that we see each other -- every now and then I see Felix my older brother very, very -- quite frequently you know, but Felix has particularly kept in close touch with them and Bunny also because he was the student lieutenant governor of the Lyon's Club there this one year. He ran for an office, he's very active at the Lyon's Club which is very, very good.

LK: Do you remember any businesses along either Alum Rock Avenue or were there any along on McKee Road at that time?

PH: None on McKee at all. Yes, going down further there was Jim Wally Vegetable Market and it was a regular store vegetables. And on Alum Rock Avenue on now it's Joey's on Alum Rock and Jackson; it's Joey Franco's. And the PW meant Poke Woehl. He bought it from this Mrs. Woehl and she was a Poke and her husband was a Woel and so PW Market. How do you spell Woehl? God it's German. W-o-e-h-l or

something like that Poke Woehl, and she had it on the opposite side of the street. It was a little small store and she used to have -- it was a very fine quality store. Her produce was very good. Then Joey Franco -- she was getting old, of course, and Joey Franco he bought her out there on that store. Then later -- the same property that I said Mr. Nelson owned, sold across the street and Joey bought that spot and that's where he bought his large PW. We call it Joey Franco. It's called Joey Franco's now?

LK: No still PW.

PH: Still PW.

LK: I mean everybody from the eastside knows Joey.

PH: My children gave an anniversary party for us and they had Joey and Florence up for the party. I'ts nice when you haven't seen each other -- oh, for years, and years.

And then there was a service station up on the corner there next to Mrs. Wohel's. Mr. Horton was the proprietor of the service station, and that's when gasoline was $.10 a gallon, and he'd have candy bars and he'd let us charge candy; but we'd have to pay the bill. He'd make us pay and oh, we'd say oh, we'd like a bar of candy, would you put it on our account? Whether it was Alma, Felix, Juanita, Evelyn, or Bunny, and he'd put it on the account. Also across from -- I don't know my corners -- from the service

station here on Jackson going down Jackson still, the Soliveras, Tony Solivera lived there. They had a riding -- I understand a track for horses, for training the horse and whatnot and it was very, very nice.

LK: Was it like a riding school?

PH: No, not a riding school. He had horses and Mr. Bowman who lived down the other end of Jackson on the opposite side of the street he would race Sulky. We were very small, but he would put Tony's daughter Beverly and I'd get on the other side and one on each side because we were tiny, and he'd take us around the track so it was a lot of fun. And, of course, Tony's daughter was a wonderful, wonderful rider. She rides very well. We used to ride horseback just about every weekend.

The Garvey family was the -- I'm trying to think along that street, the families there: Bettencourt, Enith family, there were not any children hardly on Jackson Avenue. I don't think there were any because the people were old, really old.

There was the Rodes family, I don't remember his first name, but they had probably some of the most beautiful girls in the world. They lived on Madden Avenue, father had orchards and trees. They had five girls and they were very, very beautiful. I haven't seen any of them. I remember Mrs. Hart, the Tremble family -- like I say -- Alma could just name off everybody.